

THE OLYMPIAN

Forest catastrophes need common-sense solutions

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by **Bob Dick**

Dead trees stretch to the horizon from a 1994 Washington wildfire. The closest fish-bearing streams are miles distant, and existing roads border the burn. The now-rotted timber should have been salvaged, the land replanted and returned to a forest producing clean water, habitat and forest products.

It didn't happen.

U.S. Forest Service salvage and rehabilitation plans were litigated until the timber was worthless. A tiny amount sold for a pittance. The land now is subject to damaging future fires, the U.S. Treasury is cheated out of significant income and citizens are denied high-quality forest resources. As a professional resource manager, I seethe with anger. What a waste!

Congressmen Brian Baird, D-Wash., and Greg Walden, R-Ore., will introduce legislation to reduce the foolishness surrounding catastrophic events in our forests. No longer will common sense be checked at the door; catastrophic events will be treated as emergencies needing action.

Pre-approved plans will be activated immediately, not four years hence. Some, not all, dead and dying trees will be harvested for forest products in a manner that will speed recovery of the dead forest. Roads built and used for timber salvage will be removed after use. Native species will reforest harvested areas. Trees will be planted in a manner that we might find in a natural forest. Areas prone to mass movement can be stabilized.

Some already argue this is an industry trick to harvest — pick one — live trees or just the big trees. It is a ploy, they say, to enter wilderness areas, national parks and other special areas. It will cause irreparable damage to the environment, trash fish-bearing streams, kill owls, etc.

It is none of those things.

I could finish with quotes from the bill, but, instead, let me suggest this: Look at Southwest Washington's Yacolt Burn; Northwest Oregon's Tillamook Burn; the Olympic Peninsula's Forks Fire; the Black Hills west of Olympia. These areas burned in the early 1900s, some severely and multiple times. Much of the dead timber was salvaged with yesterday's best technology, but today it would be deemed brutal.

Douglas fir was planted in rows. Snags were felled with zeal. Roads were punched in with no thought about water quality, fish or soil stability.

Guess what? These former sites of mass destruction now have magnificent forests that produce clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation and forest products.

The forest industry, U.S. Forest Service, other agencies and professional resource managers played a big part in this recovery and will play a major part in recovering today's burns.

New technology, sophisticated equipment and highly trained professionals will produce remarkable results. We are moving forward versus just saying, "NO." I'm proud of that.

We must take forestland management out of the courts and return trained professionals to the

job. We use a lot of wood in this country. We have the ability, the trained people and the technology to produce that wood and concurrently protect and enhance the forest environment. Representatives Baird and Walden recognize this. Good for them.

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